

CHELY WRIGHT

by Tamela Meredith Partridge
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Country singer and songwriter, Chely Wright, knew that music was her destiny ever since she was tape recorded as a little girl answering the question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" during a holiday family reunion.

"I grabbed the microphone and started singing 'Hey Loretta!'" Wright recalled. "I said, 'I'm going to be country star!' That was Christmas of '73, so that would make me just barely three years old."

Chely Wright and country vocalist Phil Vassar are scheduled to perform a duo headlining show at The Little Nashville Opry on Saturday, July 21, at 6 pm and again at 9:30 pm. Tickets are available through Ticketmaster, The Little Nashville Opry box office or by calling 812-988-2235.

The songstress was reared in rural Wellsville, Kansas, population 1,800, in a family with four generations of musicians.

"I grew up 'economically challenged' out in the country," Wright said. "What we did for fun was play music and play cards. I really can't remember a time when there was a family gathering that all the guitars and pianos and fiddles didn't come out. We played country music, but my grandmother was big into gospel music, and my parents had old rock 'n' roll records around, so I had a plethora of music in the house."

Early country music influences include the all-time classic sounds of Buck Owens, Loretta Lynn, Connie Smith, Wanda Jackson, Porter Wagoner and Conway Twitty.



"I used to sit around and try to sound like Loretta," Wright said. "I would actually do a lot of phrasing like Buck Owens and Porter Wagoner. There's a thing in my voice that people tell me does a kind of Connie Smith thing, flips up on the end of notes, and that's probably just from years of singing 'Once a day, every, day, all day long,' which is probably the most famous Connie Smith record. I'm proud that I have all those nuances in my voice."

Wright began singing professionally in bands at age 11 and eventually formed her own band, County Line, a few years later. Besides singing, she also learned how to play piano, guitar and performed trumpet in her junior and senior high school band programs. At 17, she spent the summer before her senior year in high school performing in a country show at the Ozark Jubilee in Branson, MO. At her grandfather's urging, Wright auditioned and won a job straight out of high school portraying Loretta Lynn, Jean Shepard and Minnie Pearl at the former Opryland theme park in Nashville, TN.

"I just called it putting myself through the college of musical knowledge," Wright said. "I got down to Nashville and did an internship. I would go to writers nights every chance I could, I would sneak into BMI and steal their magazines. Little did I know that they would have given them to me !"

Even though she has been writing songs since she was a teen, Wright was not able to obtain true songwriting success until she began developing her own style as a vocalist.

"When you are singing someone else's songs it is difficult to sing it like Chely Wright," she says. "The best thing for me to do was write my own songs, as bad as some of them were, so I could see who I really was."

Obtaining a recording contract in '94 has garnered the '95 ACM Best New Female Vocalist four albums and the chart-topping hits, "Shut Up And Drive", "Just Another Heartache," "I Already Do," "Single White Female," and "It Was."

The energetic vocalist has recently recorded her fifth album, which is slated for a late fall release. The new album's first single and video, "Never Love You Enough," is steadily climbing the country music charts.

For Wright, combining her fresh, youthful edge with the powerful elements of deep rooted country has resulted in a unique country style that is both contemporary and classic at the same time.

"I really can't imagine my life without having this dream of country music," Wright said. "I am a student of it. I know exactly what the Grand Ole Opry means and I truly do revere it. This is going to sound cheesy, but almost daily I break into a smile. I love my health, I love my lifestyle, I love life, and I love this music."